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Michigan United Conservation Clubs

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Conserving, Enhancing and Protecting Michigan's Natural Resources and Outdoors Heritage since 1937.



Thursday, March 10, 2011

Senate Committee on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism
Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) testimony

Re: Senate Bill 207 – "Hunter Heritage" Bill

Dear Chairman Hansen and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity today to support Senate Bill 207, which is a critical step in reversing Michigan's downward trend in hunter recruitment and retention.

As you all know, Michigan is a state with a rich outdoor tradition. Today, nearly two million sportsmen and women take to Michigan's woods and waters each year with friends and family to hunt, fish, trap and enjoy everything that Pure Michigan has to offer. In doing so, these sportsmen and women make up a significant portion of Michigan's tourism economy, spending roughly \$3.4 billion directly in the state each year, which has an additional \$5.9 billion economic ripple effect annually for the state and local economies. This spending also generates about \$406 million in federal taxes and \$378 million in state and local taxes each year. These sportsmen and women also pay for the lion's share of conservation in our state through license fees and federal excise taxes on sporting equipment. With a 17% reduction in hunters over 10 years, the entire state has an interest in keeping our hunting heritage – and spending – alive and well.

Sadly, however, reports point to Michigan as ranking last in the nation when it comes to the recruitment and retention of hunters. For every 100 hunters who leave the field, only 26 take their place, placing Michigan 43% below the national recruitment and retention average of 69%. For this reason, MUCC members in 2010 passed a resolution to advocate for the elimination of Michigan's minimum youth hunting age, which is considered a major barrier to bringing youth into the sport of hunting. MUCC members believe that parents, not the government, should be able to decide when their kids are mature enough to hunt under a specially designed mentored youth hunting program. Such a program would not only improve Michigan's last-in-the-nation hunter recruitment and retention rate, but also foster wholesome family-focused recreation. Additionally, the program would allow interested youth hunters to "give hunting a try" before the rigors of adolescence and extra-curricular activities fill up their schedules.

The "Hunter Heritage" Bill – Promoting hunting safety, ethics, and preserving our outdoor heritage

Much to the surprise of many who are not familiar with hunting, the activity in itself is far safer than most types of recreation, with far lower injury rates per 100 participants than most other common youth activities such as football, basketball, running/jogging, soccer, baseball and gymnastics. In fact, youth hunters rank atop the safest hunters in the field when supervised by an adult, according to the peer reviewed Youth Hunting Report. The "Hunter Heritage" Bill is not only about preserving Michigan's hunting heritage; it's about further instilling safe and ethical hunting and conservation practices in our young people. Keeping these goals in mind, the bill will allow the Natural Resources Commission to design and implement a Mentored Youth Hunting Safety Program with the input of hunting safety experts and other stakeholder groups, including Michigan's Hunter Safety Program instructors. MUCC hopes that this legislation will allow Michigan to join the ranks of other states with lower hunting incident rates. Currently, hunting incident rates are 10 percent higher in the 19 states where a minimum age is set, most likely because youth who learn hunting safety when they are young carry safe hunting habits throughout their adult lives.

Rank	Sport/Activity	Injuries per 100 Participants
1	Football (Tackle)	18.8
2	Ice Hockey	15.9
3	Boxing	12.7
5	Soccer	9.8
6	Cheerleading	9.0
7	Basketball	7.6
10	Baseball	5.8
14	Football (Touch)	4.3
16	Volleyball	3.1
21	Tennis	2.5
24	Horseback Riding	1.8
25	Aerobics	1.7
26	Roller Hockey	1.3
28	Hurling	1.3
30	Mountain/Rock Climbing	1.2

	Total Participants (14,766,000)	
	Accidents % of Total Participants Involved	Fatalities % of Total Participants Involved
All Hunters	000052	000005
Youth Hunters	000035	000008
Supervised Youth Hunters	0000015	0000002

Data from the "Families Afield" Coalition

Improve hunter recruitment and hunter safety in Michigan by allowing parents, not the government, to determine when their child is mature enough to learn about hunting and hunting safety

As mentioned before, this legislation is also aimed at reducing arbitrary barriers that are preventing families from participating in Michigan's great tradition of hunting. Currently 20 states permit a mentor to introduce hunting to a youth before the youth hunter must complete a hunter education course. Those state's hunter recruitment statistics are 25 percent higher than states with a minimum hunting age. Additionally, new research from the Youth Hunting Report shows that state laws and regulations that restrict youth hunters greatly hamper hunter recruitment efforts. The study, which states that 80 percent of hunters attribute their hunting tradition to experiences occurring when they were young,

also found that adults are leaving the field as some parents chose to forgo hunting rather than leave their child, who is under the state's minimum hunting age, out of the hunting experience. With the passage of the "Hunter Heritage" Bill, Michigan will appropriately join 31 other states that promote parent-child hunting rather than setting arbitrary, preventative age barriers.

Lagging behind – Where Michigan ranks among Midwestern states

The "Hunter Heritage" legislation is modeled after Pennsylvania's Youth Hunting Safety Program (see attached sheet), which was signed into law in 2005 and has worked exceptionally well since. In Pennsylvania's first year with the program in 2006, 43,780 youth were mentored by 32,913 adults. Popularity of the program further increased in popularity in 2007 with 58,883 mentored youth hunters who were mentored by 51,141 adults. In 2008-2009, Pennsylvania's hunter recruitment/retention ratio also benefited with a 21,437 spike in general hunting license sales.

Other states besides Pennsylvania have taken action as well:

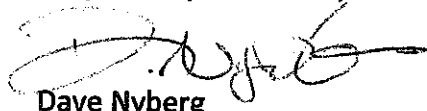
- In 2006, Ohio passed legislation establishing an apprentice hunting license that allows youth to hunt with family members - Ohio does not have a minimum youth hunting age
- In 2005, Minnesota passed legislation allowing youth under 12 to hunt wild turkey with their parents
- Indiana, Illinois and Iowa do not have a minimum hunting age - all three are in the top 14 states for hunter recruitment and retention

Additional benefits of the "Hunter Heritage" Bill

With all of the reasons listed above to pass Senate Bill 207, there are also some laudable "indirect" benefits from promoting this legislation. Youth hunters who are taught about hunting safety and ethics at a young age also learn valuable life lessons like respect and appreciation for nature, respect for others, patience, self-control and responsibility. Additionally, keeping a healthy hunting population is also important for controlling high deer population levels, which can positively help farmers by reducing crop damage. Balancing the deer population at a healthy level is also important for reducing deer/automobile collisions, which can play a factor in reducing auto insurance rates.

As you can see, there are many reasons why Michigan should act to foster the future of our great outdoor traditions through this legislation. On behalf of over 42,000 members and 250 affiliated clubs of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, I ask for your support of Senate Bill 207 – Michigan's "Hunter Heritage" Bill.

Respectfully submitted,



Dave Nyberg
Legislative Affairs Manager

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Pennsylvania's Mentored Youth Hunting Program

A model for improved hunter recruitment and safety

About the Program

In 2005, Pennsylvania enacted legislation authorizing the state's Game Commission to create the *Mentored Youth Hunting Program*

Guidelines for the Program established by the Pennsylvania Game Commission:

- The Program is available to minor youth hunters under age 12
- Mentor must be at least 21 years of age
- Mentor must possess a valid Hunting License
- Mentored youth hunters must possess a special permit, which is good for small game hunting and includes kill tags for an antlered deer and spring gobbler
- Youth must be within arm's length away from mentor at all times
- No more than one mentored youth per mentor

↑ Hunter Recruitment

The *Mentored Youth Hunting Program* is succeeding by introducing more kids to hunting

- **2009-10** – 28,542 more youth hunters entered the woods in Pennsylvania
- **2010-11** – 28,748 Permits have already been sold before the State's spring turkey season has been taken into effect.

Compare to Michigan

- Michigan currently has the worst hunter recruitment and retention rate in the country
- Out of every 100 hunters that leave the field in Michigan, only 26 replace them

Safety

- The *Mentored Youth Hunting Program* in Pennsylvania was broadly supported by Hunter Safety instructors
- Since the program's inception, Hunter Safety instructors have approved the *Mentored Youth Hunting Program* because students are generally more prepared and aware of safe practices while taking Hunter Safety because of their Mentored hunting experience (PA Game Commission)
- According to the PA Game Commission Staff, the Mentored Youth Mentor Program is helping to cure bad hunting habits by youngsters with the program's strict guidelines



HUNTER HERITAGE BILL

Michigan ranks last in recruitment and retention of hunters. It's time to fix that.

Michigan is a state with a rich outdoor tradition. Today, nearly two million sportsmen and women take to Michigan's woods and waters each year with friends and family to hunt, fish, trap and enjoy everything that Pure Michigan has to offer. In doing so, these sportsmen and women make up a significant portion of Michigan's tourism economy, spending roughly \$3.4 billion directly in the state each year, which has an economic ripple effect to the tune of \$5.9 billion annually for the state and local economies. This spending also generates about \$406 million in federal taxes and \$378 million in state and local taxes each year. These sportsmen and women also pay for the lion's share of conservation in our state through license fees and federal excise taxes on sporting equipment.

Sadly, however, Michigan ranks last in the nation when it comes to the recruitment and retention of hunters. For every 100 hunters who leave the field, only 26 take their place, placing Michigan 43 percent below the national recruitment and retention average of 69 percent. For this reason, MUCC members in 2010 passed a resolution to advocate for the elimination of Michigan's minimum youth hunting age, which is considered a major barrier to bringing youth into the sport of hunting.

MUCC members believe that parents, not the government, should be able to decide when their kids are mature enough to hunt under a specially designed mentored youth hunting program. Such a program would not only improve Michigan's last-in-the-nation hunter recruitment and retention rate, but also foster wholesome family-focused recreation. Additionally, the program would allow interested youth hunters to "give hunting a try" before the rigors of adolescence and extra-curricular activities fill up their schedules.

HUNTER HERITAGE BILL PROMOTES SAFETY, ETHICS AND PRESERVES MICHIGAN'S OUTDOORS HERITAGE

The Hunter Heritage Bill will allow the Natural Resources Commission to design and implement a Mentored Youth Hunting Safety Program with the input of hunting safety experts and other stakeholder groups, including Michigan's Hunter Safety Program instructors. In this sense, the Hunter Heritage Bill would improve safe hunting practices and ethics in young people.

WHAT THE HUNTER HERITAGE BILL -- DOES

The Hunter Heritage Bill enables the Michigan Natural Resources Commission to create a Mentored Youth Hunting Safety Program for individuals under the age of 17

- Mentors must be 21 years of age, possess valid

QUICK HITS

- The Hunter Heritage Bill (to be introduced by Sen. Joe Hune, based on SB 1589 of 2010).
- The Hunter Heritage Bill would establish a mentored youth hunting program allowing parents to determine at which age their kids are ready to hunt.
- The Hunter Heritage Bill does NOT negatively impact Hunter Safety nor does it degrade existing requirements.
- Michigan is lagging far behind other states in efforts to improve our hunter recruitment/retention rate – which is last in the nation.

hunting license and proof of previous hunting experience/ completion of training in a hunter safety course

- The NRC will establish specific parameters for how a youth may participate in the program with an experienced mentor

- The bill DOES NOT eliminate Hunter's Safety - it merely gives parents and mentors a chance to teach youngsters about hunting safety and ethics by establishing a program for minor youth to hunt with a mentor. Once a youth reaches age 17, he or she will still have to complete hunter safety to obtain a license.

PARENTS -- NOT THE GOVERNMENT -- SHOULD DECIDE WHEN THEIR KIDS ARE READY TO HUNT

Facts about Hunter decline and recruitment/retention nationwide:

- A new study by the Youth Hunting Report indicates that state laws and regulations that restrict youth hunters hamper recruitment efforts

- This research shows that 80% of hunters indicated their first hunting experience occurred when they were young

- The study also found that more restrictions = less youth hunters

- The study also found that adults are leaving the sport also as some parents choose to forgo hunting, rather than leave their child who is under the state's minimum hunting age out of the hunting experience

- Hunting has lower injury rates per 100 participants than most other common youth activities such as football, basketball, running/jogging, soccer, baseball and gymnastics.

- The Youth Hunting Report, which was peer reviewed for statistical validity by Trial Research, shows that youth hunters are the safest hunters in the woods

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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when accompanied by an adult mentor

- Incident rates for hunting are 10 percent higher in the 19 states where a minimum age is set - most likely because youth who learn hunting safety when they are young carry safe habits throughout their adult lives

- States that allow parents to decide when their kids are ready to hunt have better safety records than states with restrictions.

THE PENNSYLVANIA MODEL

- Pennsylvania's Mentored Youth Hunting Safety Program was authorized by Gov. Ed Rendell when he signed HB 1690 into law on Dec. 22, 2005. The bill was part of the "Families Afield" campaign

- The law authorized the Pennsylvania Game Commission to implement the program, which officially began on July 22, 2006

- In 2006, the first year of the program, 43,780 youth were mentored by 32,913 adults

- In 2007, the number of mentored youth grew to 58,883 - there were 51,141 adult mentors

- It's working! Pennsylvania saw a 21,437 spike in general hunting licenses from 2008-2009.

LAGGING BEHIND: WHERE MICHIGAN RANKS

- In 2006, Ohio passed legislation establishing an apprentice hunting license that allows youth to hunt with family members - Ohio does not have a minimum youth hunting age

- In 2005, Minnesota passed legislation allowing youth under 12 to hunt wild turkey with their parents

- Pennsylvania has run a successful mentored youth hunting program since 2006 - Michigan's "Hunter Heritage" bill is modeled after Pennsylvania's law

- Indiana, Illinois and Iowa do not have a minimum hunting age - all three are in the top 14 states for hunter recruitment and retention

- 31 states do not have a minimum hunting age - Michigan is only one of 19 states that actually have a minimum hunting age

IMPROVING HUNTER RECRUITMENT IS GOOD FOR MICHIGAN'S ECONOMY

- The 31 states that do not require a minimum hunting age have a 20 percent higher hunter recruitment rate than states with an age minimum

- The top three states in hunter recruitment and retention have age limits that are lower than Michigan's or have no age limits at all

- 20 states permit a mentor to introduce hunting to a youth before the youth hunter must complete a hunter education course. Those states' recruitment statistics are 25% higher than states with a minimum hunting age

IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN GETTING KIDS AFIELD

- The Hunter Heritage bill will positively affect non-hunters also, as hunting is big business in Michigan.

- Each year, sportsmen spend \$3.4 billion in Michigan, which has an additional \$5.9 billion economic ripple effect on the state's economy.

- This supports roughly 46,000 jobs, \$1.7 billion in salaries, and \$378 million in state and local tax revenue.

- Michigan hunters also pay for wildlife conservation through license fees, which go toward improving wildlife habitat, wildlife management, recreational access, and conservation officers

- Michigan also receives about \$24.5 million each year from federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, which go towards funding game and fish conservation in the state

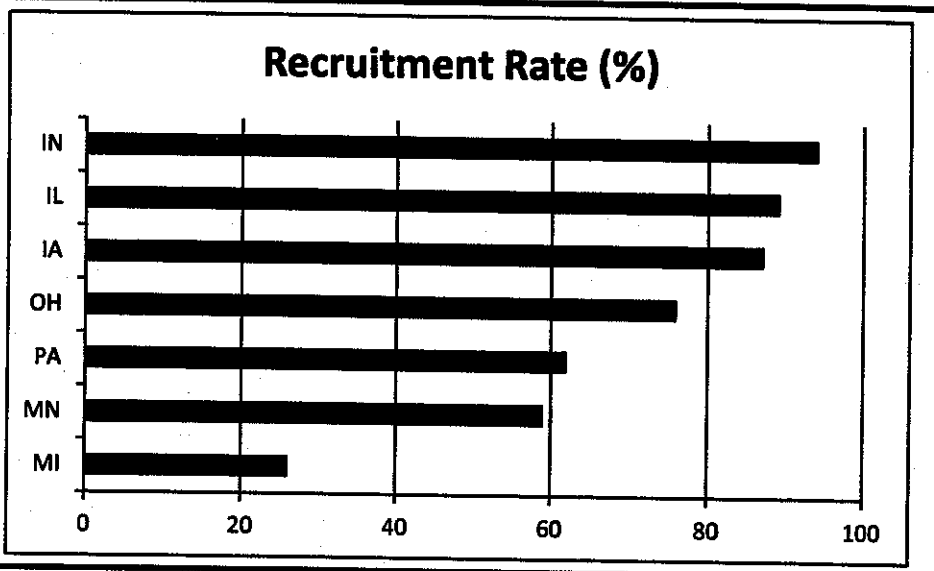
- With a 17% reduction in hunters over 10 years, the entire state has an interest in keeping our hunting heritage - and spending - alive and well

MICHIGAN IS DEAD LAST!

When it comes to recruiting/retaining hunters, Michigan is last in the nation.

For every 100 hunters that leave the sport in Michigan, just 26 replace them.

Consider the recruitment rates of a few other states.



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